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## DOH-PINELLAS URGES CAUTION AROUND WILDLIFE TO AVOID RABIES



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Contact with an unusually aggressive or too docile animal. Waking up to find a bat flying around your bedroom. Getting bitten by a nocturnal animal during the day.

These could mean you're at risk of contracting rabies.

The Florida Department of Health in Pinellas County (DOH-Pinellas) is urging residents and visitors to use caution around wildlife. A bite, scratch or contact with the paws or saliva of an infected animal can spread rabies, a viral disease that is nearly always fatal unless it's treated. Treating rabies, a public health threat, involves early treatment with a vaccine regimen.

Bats, raccoons and coyotes are frequent carriers of rabies and should never be touched by anyone other than trained handlers. This year, DOH-Pinellas has confirmed three wildlife animals with rabies.

Children should never approach a wild animal and families should never set food out for wildlife. When it comes to bats, their teeth are so small that a person may not realize he or she has been bitten if it happened in their sleep. Finding a bat in a sleeping area is a sign that the person in the bedroom has had contact with the animal—even if there are no bite marks.

Prevention is the best protection from rabies. To control the spread of rabies, follow these guidelines:

- Keep your pets' rabies vaccinations current to protect them from contact with wild animals that may be carriers. Your pet's vet or Pinellas County Animal Services can provide the vaccinations.
- Never feed, pet or interact with wildlife or strays.
- Do not leave food outdoors for pets or wildlife.
- Report animal bites or scratches to Animal Services.
- Keep your pets under direct supervision in case they encounter strays or wild animals. Keep them in a fenced yard or on a leash. If a stray or wild animal bites your pet, seek veterinary assistance for your pet immediately.
- Never adopt wild animals or bring them into your home. Do not try to nurse sick animals to health. Call Pinellas County Animal Services, (727) 582-2600, or an animal rescue agency for assistance.

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DOH-Pinellas has information about rabies and links to additional information from the Florida Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Go to <http://pinellas.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/infectious-disease-services/epidemiology/rabies/index.html> for information. Follow us on Twitter [@HealthyPinellas](#).

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